

Interviews

As a Journalist and Hooking Your Readers

Or

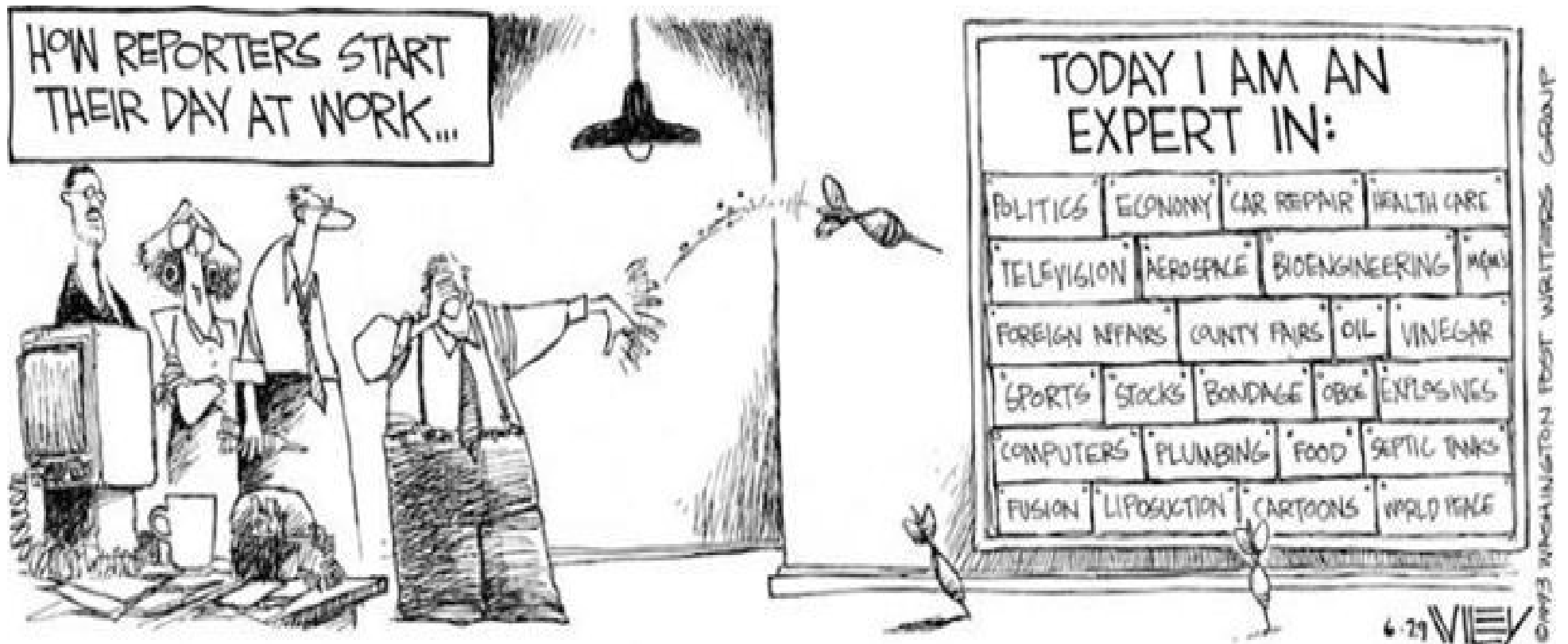
How to get information and help from someone who'd rather
be at the dentist, or on the range...

- Gidget Fuentes -

I MEF Public Affairs Summit, Jan. 14, 2016
Camp Pendleton, CA

Expectations

(Nonsequitor comic strip)



What's the purpose of an interview?

- ➔ Details, information from knowledgeable person. (Aka SME)
- ➔ Get specific professional comment, public impact comment, explanation and analysis.
- ➔ It's more than just Who-What-When-Where-Why-How. Context is key, so frame questions and research toward that end.

How to get someone to talk

“It’s a conversation, not an interview.”
– Studs Terkel, radioman/author

Types of interviews

- ➔ The quickie/on-the-fly
 - ➔ The press gaggle/press conference
 - ➔ The unexpected
 - ➔ The one-on-one
 - ➔ The mother-of-all interviews.
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- ➔ The more comfortable they feel, the more open, and honest, they'll be – and a better, more accurate and interesting story for your readers.

Know the Basics

- ➔ What do you think the story is about?
- ➔ Do your homework. Research.
- ➔ Break the ice. Introduce yourself. Shake hand confidently and speak clearly.
- ➔ Get them comfortable. Start easy, basic bios.
- ➔ Converse. Look in the eye. Smile. Nod.
- ➔ Be inquisitive and interested.
- ➔ Listen. Respect the pause.
- ➔ Don't focus all on note-taking.
- ➔ Observe them. Nervous? Confident? Distracted?

Working through the interview

- ➔ If first asked, 'What do you want to know?'
- ➔ Maximize unexpected detours, potential sidebars/stories
- ➔ Work up to key/critical questions (time dependent) by building up with background, explanations, etc that helps lay the groundwork.
- ➔ Feel them out on tough or embarrassing subject.
- ➔ Press on, or back off?

Master the note-taking

- ➔ Paper to pen a must-have and always a good backup.
- ➔ Recording (digital audio/video/cell)?
- ➔ Have some Qs handy for reference.
- ➔ Jot questions as you take notes.
- ➔ Notate any follow-up questions or items to clarify or expand.
- ➔ Keep keen ear for good quotes.

DO s and DON'T s

- ➡ Don't be afraid to ask, 'Can you explain/expand?' 'What do you mean?'
- ➡ Don't hesitate to say, I want to understand X, or If I could follow up...
- ➡ Avoid yes/no questions, how do you feel?
- ➡ Don't take no comment, if possible find another way to ask.
- ➡ Be tactful, professional.
- ➡ Act as if you are confident, even if you don't feel it or don't master the subject.

Working through a tough interview

- ➔ Someone of few words. Awkward silences.
- ➔ The unreluctant interviewee. You may have to take lead.
- ➔ Seemingly hostile. Ease them through questions, but know when to cut bait and shorten interview, and find others willing to help you.
- ➔ The group interview. Organization is key.
- ➔ Your own nervousness.
- ➔ Now they don't want to be quoted.

Miscellaneous

- ➞ Interviewing by phone
- ➞ Ask, Anything else you'd like to add, emphasize?
- ➞ Ask, Who else should I speak with?
- ➞ Don't forget to thank them for their time. Ask if you have follow-ups to contact them.

References etal

- ➞ Poynter.org, Columbia Journalism Review, Writer's Digest among others
- ➞ Dictionary, thesaurus (paper/online)
- ➞ The Elements of Style.
- ➞ Research tools, first-person or historical accounts. Verify, cross-reference
- ➞ A story, whether news breaking or profile, is like putting together a puzzle. Use your interviews, research, observations and brain to craft the story.
- ➞ ANY MORE QUESTIONS???